

In the post 9/11 reorganization, FEMA joined 21 other agencies to form the new Homeland Security Department, and was stripped of the Cabinet rank that had allowed it to report directly to the President. Later, in a further department shuffle back in July, FEMA lost its mission of working with State and local governments on preparedness plans even before a disaster hits. FEMA used to be a very powerful organization, with veteran staffers, that is, up until the Bush administration threw everything together into one huge department, ironically labeling it "Homeland Security." What the new department should have been called is the "Department of Insecurity!"

And now, as many here in Washington and around the country have been urging for the agency to have its independence restored, the Republican Congress has just taken away people and money, as well as power and authority from FEMA, doing away with our national security while doling out tax cuts for the rich. This agency, which in the past has given out hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to State and local responders, has now lost the ability to do so, leaving grant giving in the hands of the overextended Homeland Security Department. Moreover, the Bush administration has canceled other FEMA programs, including a Clinton administration-era disaster mitigation effort known as Project Impact. And what's more, at a time in our history when homeland security experts are calling for a greater emphasis on preparing for calamity, Michael Brown, FEMA's current director, has faced years of funding cuts, personnel departures and the downgrading of the department. And of course, worse yet, Michael Brown himself is a mere political appointee, who obtained his current position because of his close friendship with Joe M. Allbaugh, who managed President Bush's 2000 presidential campaign. I think many would agree with me that for a position as important as this one, past experience in emergency management is crucial.

One other terrible decision made previously in the administration was the transferring of the Coast Guard to the Department of Homeland Security. Let us remember that the Coast Guard was the first agency to respond to the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Within minutes after the attacks, their ships were guarding our bridges and waterways.

In closing, it is clear that we really need to evaluate our country's ability to handle national disasters. It is simply unacceptable for the Federal Government to wait until there are bodies floating down rivers to begin activating the National Guard! Again, I would have hoped that FEMA would have had a contingency plan in the case of a major hurricane hitting the Gulf Coast. Yet obviously, they did not.

#### ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take my Special Order at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

#### HURRICANE KATRINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, hurricanes may be natural disasters, but Hurricane Katrina has made it clear to anyone in the world with a television that who lives and who dies, who is left to suffer, who is left without the most basic necessities of life, who is left without medical care as a result of that disaster is very much related to who you are.

We have watched with horror and rapidly growing anger as Katrina came and went and left behind many, overwhelmingly poor, black, old, sick, to drown, to be stranded, to be herded into shelters under filthy, inhuman conditions, to be left in sweltering heat without water and food and to be cut off from health care. Why did it take aid and security so long to arrive?

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We have received no answer.

Why were we so unprepared? We have received no answer.

What kind of shelters are planned without stockpiles of water and food as well as basic sanitation, medical personnel, and emergency power? We have received no answer.

Why did we not immediately press into service every able-bodied National Guard member? Why did we not immediately bring into service emergency teams from cities across the country? We have received no answer.

Why have we not moved to use unoccupied military barracks to house families left homeless by the storm? We have received no answer.

Where are the plans and the resources to stabilize the lives of hundreds of thousands with no homes, no jobs, no schools? We have received no answers.

Where are the plans and the resources to rebuild all that has been destroyed and to heal the families and communities left so devastated? We have received no answers.

When will we act to rein in the profiteering by big oil? We have received no answer.

How much can we do to lessen the impact of big storms by restoring natural buffers like wetlands, ending our disinvestment in infrastructure such as levees and acting to halt global warming? We have received no answer.

Ordinary Americans have responded without reservation. They have opened their hearts and their wallets. They have already given hundreds of millions of dollars. They have given of their time and their material possessions. Many have opened their homes.

We thank all of those who have contributed and we urge every household to find some way to join this great patriotic effort. Despite the sometimes heroic efforts of many frontline first responders, America's response to Katrina has been every bit as big a disaster as the storm itself.

It is government, especially the Federal Government, that has failed. "Un-

acceptable" is much too weak a term to describe that response to this disaster. It is time, it is past time, to put America's priorities straight and get them straight today.

I call upon the President to immediately mobilize adequate resources, medical supplies, personnel, security, transportation, and move those who are still in harm's way to safety. We call on the administration to present to Congress an emergency plan and a budget to address the needs of all those left homeless and jobless while their homes and communities are being rebuilt.

I call on the President to initiate an emergency public works program to rebuild America, to restore infrastructure, roads, bridges, water and sewers; and to mesh with private-sector insurance to rebuild every home, every small business.

We have a clear choice. We can use this as an opportunity to offer thousands, especially our young people, a chance to work to learn new skills from construction to nursing, or we can abandon tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands who have been uprooted and displaced, who have lost their material possessions, but each of whom is still a unique and irreplaceable person with untapped resources.

The President indicated that there is no limit to what we will spend in Iraq. I ask, how much will we spend in America?

I thank all of those in my immediate community, from the governor to the mayor to the president of our county board, all elected officials, churches, members of organizations and groups. I am proud to live in Chicago and in Illinois where we have opened our hearts and our wallets, and I simply ask that our Federal Government do the same.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ).

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REICHERT). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

#### SWEEP AROUND OUR OWN FRONT DOOR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Mrs. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I stand today concerned about what happened on the Gulf Coast from Hurricane Katrina. I hope that apart from